

SC DHEC Influenza Media Teleconference
November 19, 2004

Over the next three months, 190,000 doses will be arriving in S.C. Over 53,000 of those doses arrived in recent weeks, and will be distributed among nursing homes, hospitals, and community health centers. We issued a news release today on this matter, and you should have it already.

A second news release concerns the state's first confirmed cultured flu case.

We will have opening comments from Mr. Greene, then your questions.

Mr. Greene:

Thank you. As of Nov 5, there had been 502,294 doses of injectible vaccine shipped to SC providers. I want to give you an idea what that means in relation to past years.

This particular distribution thru November 5 has gone to a multitude of providers, including primary care physicians, hospitals, pharmacies, community health centers, dialysis centers, etc. Primary care providers typically vaccinate half the doses that are given during the year. Information we have indicates that private providers have received more than half the distribution so far.

In any given year, it is estimated that in S.C., one million doses are administered. If you look at priority groups for vaccination, those estimates in S.C. are 1.5 million persons. The forecast of vaccine expected in SC, the remainder of this year, shipments in November, December and January, will total approximately 619, 018.

So you can see we won't have enough to meet the high-risk need. In fact, it's less than half.

DHEC is a provider and an advisor to public health. As a provider, we ordered 230,000 doses for children and public health clinics. Most of that vaccine has been received in DHEC, and has been distributed to regional and district health department and to private vaccine for children (VFC) providers. The priorities reached by the VFC program are infants and young children. In the beginning of this year, county health departments had public clinics at the same time we learned of the shortage. The prioritization by the CDC was to reserve those doses for persons in priority groups. It's working. We're hearing from providers wanting to order more vaccine, saying it's for persons on waiting lists and persons who fall within priority groups.

We have two processes for allocation and distribution:

The remaining doses in DHEC ownership totals about 53,000 doses. The amount available for S.C. public health totals 116,724 doses. Those doses will be allocated and distributed by what I call "Process B". "Process A" are those that were purchased by DHEC. The 53k doses will be distributed to providers that did not receive vaccine due to

distribution issues with Chiron. Groups of providers prioritized to receive vaccine are 209 nursing homes, hospitals that did not receive so far (33-37%), and around 18 community health centers. Process A began yesterday (11/18/04). Half of those doses were distributed to the public health districts and regions of the state. They're working to identify and contact nursing homes, based on needs assessment, to arrange for allocation and distribution.

Allocation Process B deals with the public health apportionment of the remaining ten million doses in the nation. CDC used a formula where each state, based on persons needing vaccine and the amount of vaccine already distributed, determined the apportionment for the states. Our share is over 116,000 doses.

60% of the vaccine is available for ordering and shipping in November and December. The remainder is available in January 2005.

The DHEC immunization division is processing orders. Any primary care provider, nursing home, hospitals, etc. that has not been contacted yet by their local DHEC health district office can call us at our toll free number to place orders. The number to call is 800-277-4687. The allocation system works through distributors. The pricing of each dose will be different based on the distributor used. The turnaround time is about 1-2 days once it is processed. An account is established for distribution of the vaccine. We're taking orders and processing them to CDC already thru the B process.

Questions:

ABC news in Charleston: You say approximately one million persons need shots. But you only received 600,000?

A: The priority groups are defined by CDC. If you define those groups, that's how many people it equates to across the state. Those 619,000 doses, that's the total that's forecast to be shipped into S.C. this year. Much of that, about half a million, has already been shipped to providers. So we're only talking about 119k doses remaining.

Channel 7 in Spartanburg: Out of those persons in need, many don't come forward anyway. Even if they need, they don't get it.

A: That's right. About one million doses of vaccine are administered each year in S.C. The estimated high-risk population in our state is one and a half million. At best, in any given year, only a portion of the high-risk population is being vaccinated.

Ch 7: This year, we're still hitting most of the people who got it in the past?

A: Yes, that's likely. The doses administered in SC may not have all gone to high priority groups.

Ch 7: When is it available?

A: We're recommending that, because shipments go to primary providers, you should continue to contact your doctor. Has he/she received vaccine? The toll free number is for use by the doctors only.

Ch 7: What about using FluMist?

A: These numbers do not include FluMist. We have the ordering information for MedImmune. Doses are available. That company continues to accept orders, but the amount they're producing is limited. We encourage hospitals and nursing homes to order it, if their patients can use it.

There are approximately three million doses of FluMist available nationwide.

Post & Courier: Which counties are most in need of vaccine?

A: It depends on the vaccine distribution data by county. Where has it gone, to which counties compared to the number of high risk persons. The difficulty is that the distributor may be here in the Midlands. That distributor may receive 25,000 doses and has contracts with nursing homes and doctors across the state. Distribution data is spread out for each distributor. The greatest needs are being identified by a needs assessment out of each county. Who did not receive vaccine? That's where the public health portion is targeted, the 53,000 doses. Nursing homes, hospitals, community health centers.

P & C: But which counties?

A: It's scattered. We know a lot of nursing homes didn't get vaccine. You can look at where nursing homes are located.

P & C: Nursing homes are the worst off?

A: Yes. That was a decision inside public health to go forward meeting priority needs at nursing homes, hospitals and community centers.

Channel 5 in Charleston: Have you identified any cases in our area?

A: There has been one cultured confirmed case in Richland County only. That comes from a physician who sent a swab to our lab. That case probably represents many cases before we get a positive culture. There's sporadic flu in Georgia and North Carolina. We expect it in S.C.

Our surveillance systems will pick it up: either through sentinel doctors reporting influenza-like illness (ILI) or by rapid flu tests from doctors' offices. But at this time, there is only one definite case. There are probably more, but not a lot. However, we expect the flu to spread.

DHEC is in control of the allocation of the vaccine that is coming into S.C. The remaining doses for S.C. is 190,000 doses.

Of those, 53,000 are being allocated to nursing homes, hospitals, and community health centers.

116,000 of them are available for other primary providers to start ordering it. They can call us toll free to place an order. Expect shipment over the next two months depending on how the shipping is broken up.

The State: Are you concerned about some of those doses coming in January? Isn't that kind of late into the season?

A: We wish we could get them all now.

However, we know that, on average from when the first cases occur until the peak, it's around 6-8 weeks. That would suggest that if we're just seeing the flu now, it might peak around the beginning of 2005 and continue for another month or two. That fits with the way flu behaves in our state.

The State: Where is the case? What town in Richland County?

A: I don't know. This one case represents many.

The State: What has the needs assessment told you about remaining doses, and whether the incoming shipment will cover the need? Do you have a feeling how many people will be left out? Is this the last of the vaccine?

A: This is the last of the vaccine, to our knowledge. 116,000 doses for South Carolina.

Regarding providers: for primary care providers and hospitals, medical practices that need to order it, they account for a lot of the distribution of the 506,000 doses. The first report we received showed over 400,000 in the state; then 470,000; now 506,000.

Vaccine continues to arrive in S.C. to primary practices. That's why you need to contact your doctor. They're being supplied vaccine. We can provide what we get. But it's difficult to know how far it will go. When we contact some doctors, they say they already have vaccine and don't need any more. It's a dynamic that's hard to answer.

The State: Are providers getting more vaccine in by themselves?

A: Yes.

Anderson Independent Mail: What about the distribution of the flu in rural vs. urban areas? Regarding the way flu behaves: How do you balance vaccine distribution to meet needs of rural residents?

A: Flu is spread by droplets and airborne. It's infectious. It's going to spread to everywhere. It doesn't hit every person. Some people don't get exposed and some have leftover immunity. The virus that's circulating is the same as last year and it's the one in the vaccine. In the average flu year, somewhere between 10-20% get the flu. Rural and urban.

Our efforts are guided by a desire to cover as many people as we can with the available vaccine, particularly young children and the elderly. They have a greater risk of hospitalization and complications than the well public. We think the message is out now that vaccine should only go to persons in priority groups. Those distributions we're doing target those groups, specifying nursing homes and community centers and such. But with this virus, it's hard to say that the end product be more rural than urban. That's hard to answer.

This is the first year that the recommendation reaches for infants and young children six months to 23 months of age. That's all for children. They tend to have higher rates of hospitalization than most that catch flu. The other group with high problems is persons over 65.

The State: How is the flu season across the country? Mild?

A: Too early to tell. Not as early as last year, which was quite early. It isn't spreading very fast. Appears in big urban centers. It's behaving like a typical flu year. Hopes are that this virus (H3N2) hasn't changed since last year, not very much. So people should be protected.

The State: Did the patient have to be hospitalized?

A: I think it was an older man. Don't think he was hospitalized. An alert physician cultured him and the lab confirmed influenza.

Adventure Radio: People are getting crazy over flu shots. There was a run on shots here. How do you feel about that?

A: Forty years ago, we couldn't do much about flu. Most cases consist of fever and aches, headaches, maybe a cough. Then it goes away. But when you look at the impact of flu on hospitalization and death, every year the number of deaths from pneumonia, lung disease, chronic asthma – these people don't do well and often die. The thing that tips the scale against them is the flu. Some hidden diseases and death are linked. In fact, it's a big killer. But for a healthy young person, it's just fever and aches. Now that we recognize the flu and can treat it, we want to prevent more of the deaths.

The State: When did the 53k doses arrive?

A: We received them over the last 2-3 weeks.

The State: Any more lines? Distribution issues?

A: The agency (DHEC) will allocate to high-risk providers.

Ind. Mail: Where is vaccine kept?

A: It's kept securely in a certain location.

Augusta Chronicle: Georgia is using a different system. What options do you have for distribution?

A: I described two processes for allocation of DHEC-owned vaccine (53,000 doses). There are potentially several ways to best use it, and I've described the decision we made. The allocation of the 116,000 is for S.C. of the remaining doses. The process will help providers who need vaccine. We have a secure order network and key in orders. We are allocated to ensure that providers who order are onboard to prioritize the vaccine they receive.

Aug. Chronicle: The process is dictated?

A: Yes, by CDC.

To track flu spread, the DHEC website has an improved system for surveillance. Go to the site on the news release to drill down on the maps.

Site will be updated once a week, on Wednesdays.

You should have received the DHEC news release regarding today's announcement. The information is also available on the website. An audio recording and transcript will be posted on website, too.

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